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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000195

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CHINESE VISITORS SHOW INTEREST IN THAILAND-BASED BURMESE EXILE GROUPS

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11. (SBU) Summary. Chinese visitors from Yunnan traveled to northern Thailand in May and July to plumb the exile groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the Burmese opposition movement. These two trips were the latest in a two-year series of back-and-forth cross-border visits with Burmese exile leaders. The recurring contacts appear to demonstrate Chinese interest

12. (SBU) Nyo Myint, a member of the foreign affairs committee of the National Coalition Union of Burma (NCUB), accompanied two Chinese individuals he believed to be the director and deputy director of a research department around Thailand July 12-27. In May he accompanied one of the same individuals plus a second Yunnan visitor from the same department. Both visits were aimed at learning more about the exile groups, their relations with the U.S., and their connections with the National League of Democracy (NLD). Note that we have no independent confirmation of the Chinese visitors' official status and the extent to which they have influence in Chinese official or academic circles.

13. (SBU) On both occasions the Yunnan visitors said they had been instructed by Beijing to look at the democratic groups and related NGOs in review. Nyo Myint reported that the Chinese are aware of the role the US plays through NGOs in the Burmese political movement and therefore sought meetings with these groups as well.

14. (SBU) The Chinese visitors noted the need to learn more about the democratic groups after 16 years of SPDC power in Rangoon; Nyo Myint observed that the Chinese knew little about the exile groups. Nyo Myint believed the Chinese outreach effort was sparked at least in part by the October 2004 ousting of former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, considered a favorite of

15. (SBU) The visitors showed concern over the fall of Khin Nyunt and instability within the SPDC. Nyo Myint believed that the Chinese were

16. (SBU) No Thai officials accompanied the two Chinese, who apparently entered as tourists. Nor were Chinese Consulate officials involved, presumably wanting to stay away from any meeting with Burmese dissidents that might disturb China and Burma's trading relationship.

Chiang Mai, Mae Sot, Mae Sai, Mae Hong Son, Bangkok

17. (SBU) In May the Chinese officials traveled to Chiang Mai, Mae Sot, and Mae Sai; the July 12-27 travelers went to Chiang Mai, Mae Sot, Mae Hong Son and Bangkok. Nyo Myint supplied an airline booking printout showing the July visitors' names as Zhang Lin (department head) and Yin Jianlan (deputy). Mr. Yin, a fluent Burmese speaker, was making his fifth trip to Thailand; he told Nyo Myint he travels to Burma every two months. The May visit included a Yunnan University PhD student with excellent English and decent Burmese whose name came across as Chao Ying. Nyo Myint accompanied both pairs during both trips.

18. (SBU) The May trip included meetings with the NCUB, the NLD-Liberated Areas (NLD-LA), the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), the Defiance Committee (PDC), and the Women's League of Burma. The group discussed regional stability and the issue of the ASEAN chair. The Chinese indicated that they understood the potential negative impact of the Burmese regime taking the chair but expressed unhappiness with US and EU interference in ASEAN affairs.

19. (SBU) In Chiang Mai the officials met with NCUB General

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Secretary Maung Maung to discuss the NCUB's political vision and efforts to improve reconciliation between ethnic stakeholders

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and the democratic camps. The officials also showed interest in meeting with NGOs assisting Burmese refugees, including the Burma Relief Center (BRC), the National Health and Education Committee (NHEC), and the Burma Fund. In Mae Hong Son they met with ethnic Burmese staff of the International Rescue Committee (IRC). In meetings with NGOs, the officials showed interest in the structure and work of the organizations and whether the groups received U.S. funding.

110. (SBU) In July the Yunnan visitors took a look at the outside of the Nu Po refugee camp and paid a call to the office of the Irrawaddy me help African-Americans. They told Nyo Myint that the laws favor ethnic minorities to the extent that minorities have priority access to university and would likely win against a Han Chinese in a dispute. Nyo Myint reported that the KNU and others were favorably impressed by these accounts.

111. (SBU) In the other direction, Burmese exile officials have visited Kunming repeatedly, beginning with an NLD visit in 2003. Nyo Myint has traveled there seven times, including to Beijing.

112. (U) Bio: Nyo Myint is a former central youth leader and central committee member of the NLD in 1988. He was a bodyguard and political aide to Aung San Suu Kyi 1988-89. An American citizen since 1998, Nyo Myint has degrees from the University of Rangoon and the University of Texas at Austin. He is currently deputy head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the NLD (Liberated Area) and member of the NCUB Foreign Affairs Committee. His

113. (SBU) Comment: Recent events in Burma, including Khin Nyunt's fall, may have increased Chinese concern about the instability of the regime. Learning more about the possible role of minority and exile groups in any future changes not only makes sense from a policy review context but could also serve as a hint to the

This cable was coordinated with ConGen Chengdu.

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